

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 175960

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UNCLAS STATE 175960

FOLLOWING REPEAT STATE 175960 ACTION IAEA VIENNA, BUENOS
AIRES, BRASILIA, ERDA GERMANTOWN JUL 25.

QUOTE: UNCLAS STATE 175960

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PARM, AR

SUBJECT: NEWSWEEK STORY ON SAFEGUARDS/ARGENTINA.

REF: STATE 158043

REF: IAEA VIENNA 5823

1. ACDA HAD OCCASION ISSUE DENIAL TO SCIENCE MAGAZINE,
AMONG OTHERS. JULY 25 ISSUE OF SCIENCE CARRIES FOLLOWING
STORY BY ROBERT GILLETTE UNDER HEADING "ACDA SCOTCHES
RUMORS OF ARGENTINE NUCLEAR THEFT."

2. BEGIN TEXT. HAS ARGENTINA PURLOINED SOME OF ITS OWN
PLUTONIUM? RUMORS THAT THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTED
TO EVADE INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARD CONTROLS TO DIVERT AS MUCH
AS 50 KILOGRAMS OF PLUTONIUM FROM ITS NEW POWER REACTOR AT
ATUCHA, NEAR BUENOS AIRES, HAVE CIRCULATED THROUGH
WASHINGTON FOR SEVERAL WEEKS, PROMPTING AN UNUSUAL DENIAL
IN LATE JULY BY THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S ARMS CONTROL AND
DISARMAMENT AGENCY. ACCORDING TO AN ACDA SPOKESMAN, "THE
U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT ARGENTINA HAS
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PAGE 02 STATE 175960

SOUGHT TO DIVERT NUCLEAR MATERIALS IN VIOLATION OF INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY (IAEA) SAFEGUARDS."

3. THE RUMOR, BASED ON AN INTELLIGENCE REPORT OF UNCERTAIN ORIGIN, CAUSED A CONSIDERABLE STIR IN OFFICIAL WASHINGTON, COMING AS IT DID AT THE HEIGHT OF CONCERN OVER WEST

GERMANY'S AGREEMENT TO SELL NUCLEAR FUEL TECHNOLOGY TO BRAZIL, ARGENTINA'S CHIEF POLITICAL COMPETITOR.

4. THE RUMOR WAS, MOREOVER, AT LEAST marginally PLAUSIBLE. SOME STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS ARE CONVINCED THAT BOTH THE BRAZILIAN AND ARGENTINE GOVERNMENTS HAVE OPTED TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES AS THE NECESSARY NUCLEAR FUEL TECHNOLOGY BECOMES AVAILABLE. EIGHTEEN MONTHS AGO ARGENTINA BECAME THE FIRST LATIN AMERICAN NATION TO OPERATE A NUCLEAR POWER REACTOR, A 320-MEGAWATT GERMAN MODEL FUELED WITH NATURAL URANIUM--A DESIGN THAT PERMITS UNLOADING OF IRRADIATED FUEL CONTAINING PLUTONIUM WITHOUT SHUTTING THE REACTOR DOWN. ARGENTINA ALSO POSSESSES A SMALL FUEL REPROCESSING PLANT FOR EXTRACTING THE PLUTONIUM.

5. THUS THE PUTATIVE REPORT OF A DIVERSION FOUND FERTILE GROUND IN WASHINGTON. SOURCES SAY, HOWEVER, THAT INVESTIGATION BY THE IAEA FOUND IT TO BE "SUBSTANTIALLY IN ERROR" AND THAT ARGENTINA'S SMALL STOCKPILE OF PLUTONIUM--OSTENSIBLY ACCUMULATED FOR FAST-NEUTRON REACTOR RESEARCH--WAS ALL PRESENT AND ACCOUNTED FOR. WHAT'S MORE, THE DIVERSION OF 50 KILOGRAMS OF PLUTONIUM (ENOUGH FOR AT LEAST FIVE EXPLOSIVES) WOULD HAVE REQUIRED REPROCESSING SOME 40 TO 50 TONS OF SPENT FUEL, FAR EXCEEDING THE REPORTED 200-KILOGRAM ANNUAL CAPACITY OF ARGENTINA'S PLANT. THE PLANT, AT LAST REPORT, WAS IN A DISMANTLED STATE AWAITING EXPANSION.--R.G. END OF TEXT. KISSINGER
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*** Current Classification *** UNCLASSIFIED

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